

## Structured Observations

Observing students in various school settings provides useful information to the assessment process. Informal interviews can be recorded in narrative style. However, in order to use observation data to measure progress or to compare performance across settings or times it must be in a formal structured format. Decisions about what to observe and where to observe should be related to the primary problem being assessed. Behavioral observations can measure the frequency of a behavior or the duration of a behavior.

The following observation format is a time sample format developed by a school social worker over 25 years of professional practice. The codes represent the author's preferences. Practitioners may change the codes or format to fit their needs.

Time Sampling: A time sampling strategy involves observing during short intervals and recording. The observer looks at the target child for an interval of time, then records the behavior observed before moving on to look at a peer for the same interval length, and recording the peer's behavior. More than one comparison peer can be used. When all of the students being observed have been observed for one interval, the observer goes to the second interval and repeats the process.

Choosing a peer to observe: The peers that are observed should represent the "average behavior" in the class. The social worker may want to ask the teacher to identify one or more students, of the same sex as the target student, that represent the "class average."

Interval Length: The length of the interval can vary from 4 seconds to 30 seconds. The longer the interval the more difficult it may be to decide whether it should be coded as a plus for engaged or a minus for not engaged. Longer intervals require a clock with a second hand to measure the length of the interval. The practitioner can usually silently count a 4 second interval. After the interval is over the practitioner records their observation on the chart.

Recording: The columns labeled "student" or "peer 1" or "peer 2" contain either a + or a -. The plus sign indicates that the student is academically engaged. If the students are working in small groups and the student is looking at the students in his or her group and occasionally responding, the student would be coded with a plus sign. If, however, the student was looking at or interacting with a student in a nearby group, the code would be a minus. If the teacher had directed the students to work silently at their desks, the student would only receive a plus if he or she appears to be working. However, if the student is rummaging through his or her desk, staring out the window, or talking to another student, the code would be a minus. The next column, labeled "code" provides the observer with an opportunity to record the type of behavior the student is performing when he or she is not academically engaged. The practitioner can record in that column or leave it blank.

# STRUCTURED OBSERVATION RECORD

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ School: \_\_\_\_\_ Observer: \_\_\_\_\_ Student: \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher: \_\_\_\_\_ Adult in charge: \_\_\_\_\_ Time/Activity: \_\_\_\_\_ Length of Interval: \_\_\_\_\_

Interval #	Target Student	Code	Peer 1	Target Student	Code	Peer 2	Target Student	Code	Comments
1.									
2.									
3.									
4.									
5.									
6.									
7.									
8.									
9.									
10.									
11.									
12.									
13.									
14.									
15.									
16.									
17.									
18.									
19.									
20.									
21.									
22.									
23.									
24.									
25.									
Interval #	Target Student	Code	Peer 1	Target Student	Code	Peer 2	Target Student	Code	Comments

26.									
27.									
28.									
29.									
30.									
31.									
32.									
33.									
34.									
35.									
36.									
37.									
38.									
39.									
40.									
41.									
42.									
43.									
44.									
45.									
46.									
47.									
48.									
49.									
50.									

### SUMMARY

	Student	Peer #1	Peer #2
<b>Number</b> of intervals student <b>was</b> engaged in learning			
<b>Percent</b> of intervals student <b>was</b> engaged in learning			
<b>Number</b> of intervals the student <b>was not</b> engaged in learning			
<b>Percent</b> of intervals student <b>was not</b> engaged in learning			